

*“When I Look at Your Heavens”*

Meditation on Psalm 8

May 22, 2016

Trinity Sunday: MIPC

*To the leader: according to The Gittith. A Psalm of David. O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens. Out of the mouths of babes and infants you have founded a bulwark because of your foes, to silence the enemy and the avenger. When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established; what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them? Yet you have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honor. You have given them dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under their feet, all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas. O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!*

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When our granddaughter, Jessi, came to visit us last weekend, I was in awe of the little girl. She had changed so much since the last time we had seen her at her home in Boston--when she was only 10 months old, not yet walking, and hardly talking. We wanted to get to know her, but she and her parents, Daniel and Hiu-fai, were only staying with us 3 days. I found myself watching her intently--making mental note of her expressions, the sound of her voice, her laughter, her likes and dislikes. What made her sad or afraid.

Happily, she still had many new things to experience with us here, her first time in Florida! They went to the beach. Jessi liked the water, but was a bit intimidated by the ocean! She enjoyed playing in the sand.

After church on Sunday, we went to lunch and learned that Jessi loves Panera bread! We went to the zoo after that. Jessi saw her first baby giraffe! We went on a walk in our neighborhood, and Jessi made friends with Molly, our sheltie. The friendship grew to love and they slept together at night. On Monday, our last full day together, we went to Kennedy Space Center. Jessi was excited about seeing “spaceships.” She showed Grandpa how to spacewalk. On the way to the Vehicle Assembly Building, Jessi sang, “The wheels on the bus go round and round.”

We experienced many touching moments together that day. I particularly enjoyed the newest Imax feature, “A Beautiful Planet.” The movie provides breathtaking views of our world, and shares the hopes for future space exploration. But it also highlights the need to take better care of our beautiful planet. Cosmonauts went into space to learn and experience new worlds; they came back with revealing photos of the earth, wounded by human abuse, giving us new understandings of the world in which we live.

I felt inspired, as well, when we listened to the 1962 clip of Kennedy’s, “We go to the moon speech” at one of the exhibits. No doubt it helped change the course of history and lifted our country out of fear and into hope. Here is a small excerpt. “I do say that space can be explored and mastered without feeding the fires of war,” said JFK, “without repeating the mistakes that man has made in extending his writ around this globe of ours. There is no strife, no prejudice, no national conflict in outer space as yet. Its hazards are hostile to us all. Its conquest deserves the best of all mankind, and its opportunity for peaceful cooperation may never come again. But why, some say, the

Moon? Why choose this as our goal? And they may well ask, why climb the highest mountain? Why, 35 years ago, fly the Atlantic? Why does Rice play Texas? We choose to go to the Moon! ... We choose to go to the Moon in this decade and do the other things, not because they are easy, but because they are hard; because that goal will serve to organize and measure the best of our energies and skills, because that challenge is one that we are willing to accept, one we are unwilling to postpone, and one we intend to win ...”

Well, you know how the 60s ended. We did get to the moon and safely back. What you might not know is that Psalm 8 went to the moon, too, with the Apollo 11 mission. It went on a disc the size of a silver dollar; with messages from 73 other countries; God’s Word remains there today.

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Psalm 8 is the first hymn of praise in the book of Psalms; its poetic voice is personal--“I” and “You”-- conveying the intimate relationship between God and the psalmist. It is one of a large collection of “psalms of David,” which could mean that David wrote them or commissioned them to be written or authorized them for use. We know this psalm was used in worship because there are notes to the worship leader after the title, “to the leader, according to the Gittith.” Gittith may be the tune to which it is sung or a stringed instrument--perhaps a zither-- that was played as the psalm was sung.

The psalm’s focus is on creation, taking us back to Genesis. The first line--repeated at the end -- is difficult to translate. The first word is the

proper name of God --YHWH--which isn't spoken in Hebrew because of its holiness. It is translated "Adonai" meaning "Lord" or "our Lord." Like Abraham when he longed for a child, the psalmist looks up at the night sky with awe and wonder as he both praises and questions the Lord.

If you are a little puzzled by the second verse that begins--"Out of the mouths of babes and infants," don't be feel badly. Scholars struggle with this verse, too. Many believe it to be another illustration of what seems to be weak and foolish in this world to human beings is, in God's reality, what is wise and strong. The young children's song of praise to God will serve as protection from God's enemies.

Looking at God's creation, the psalmist can't help but compare human beings with the Lord. For it is when we seek to know the Lord better that we begin to see and understand ourselves as we really are. In the face of God's magnificent acts of creation, the psalmist realizes how seemingly unimportant and insignificant human beings are. And yet, we aren't unimportant or insignificant to God! The psalmist asks in verses 3 and 4, "*When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established; what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?*"

The psalmist describes how the Lord views human beings, created in God's image. We are just a "little lower than God," says verse 5. The word, *elohim*, translated "God" here is sometimes translated as "gods" with a small g or "divine beings." If we connect this passage to the *elohim* in the story of Creation, then it makes sense to translate *elohim* as it is in Genesis--God. We find something different from the author of

Hebrews. He translates this word “angels” when he interprets Psalm 8. He speaks from a New Testament perspective, as Hebrews testifies to God’s love for us revealed in the sacrifice of his Son for our sakes. “What is mankind that you are mindful of them,” says Hebrews 2:6-7, “**a** son of man that you care for him? You made them a little lower than the **angels...**”

Psalm 8:5 tells of God’s gifts and expectations of us with royal language. God has “crowned” human beings with “glory and honor and given them dominion over the works of (God’s) hands.” God expects us to tend and care for the Creation--just like when the Lord formed man from the dust of the earth and put him in the garden to “tend it and keep it.” The “works of God’s hands” are “all things” God has created. The earth, air, water, plants, animals, human beings are “under our feet.” They are not ours to trample, crush or destroy, but to watch over and care for--for all of our days.

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My message today, on this day we honor our new graduates, is especially for our young adults. You will change in the years to come. Trust the Spirit. Embrace the changes. Don’t be afraid.

God loves you and wants a relationship with you even more than Jim and I long to have a relationship with our little granddaughter in Boston. The Lord wants to be your comfort and strength and help you as you experience new things. But you have to seek to have a relationship with the Lord. God wants to hear your voice, your laughter; your likes and dislikes. The Lord wants to know what makes you sad or afraid. God

also wants to be the one you go to when no one else seems to be listening, when no one else seems to care. God will always be there.

Keep on hoping and dreaming, though the going may get hard. And it may take years of overcoming obstacles and fears, possibly failures, too, before you begin to see your visions coming true. Our nation's space exploration story is one of hopes and dreams, with years of struggle, fears and failures, the greatest of which was the loss of astronauts' lives. We have more obstacles to overcome ahead--especially as we set our sights on Mars. But we have successes behind us, including what most people thought before 1969 was never going to happen--we went to the moon and safely back! On the Apollo 11 mission, astronaut Buzz Aldrin, an elder in a Presbyterian church in Houston, read aloud Psalm 8:

*O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!*

*You have set your glory above the heavens. Out of the mouths of babes and infants you have founded a bulwark because of your foes, to silence the enemy and the avenger. When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established; what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them? Yet you have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honor. You have given them dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under their feet, all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas. O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!*

Let us pray. Majestic Lord, we lift up your Holy Name and give you our thanks and praise! We come to you as weak and frail human beings, seemingly insignificant and unimportant. But we are not insignificant and unimportant to you, our Lord! Thank you for your love and for making us in your image, but a little lower than you, and for crowning us with glory and honor, though we don't deserve royal treatment. Thank you for entrusting your beautiful Creation to us to tend and keep, to watch over and care for. Help us, our Lord, to better care for our world, to be more faithful stewards of the works of your hands. Lead us to share your love and healing Words, such as Psalm 8, with a wounded and broken world. And we ask that you continue to guide, strengthen and bless the teens and young adults of our church family. Lead them to walk in the paths you want them to go--and to hold on to their faith, no matter what. We ask these things in your son's precious name. Amen.

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